

American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 3 - February 4, 2024

Pastor Scott Klimke

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Isiah 40:21-31

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

In recent weeks, we've spent a good bit of time with God the Father's declaration on the day of Jesus' baptism. Up to now, the emphasis has fallen upon the words "you are my Son;" these very words, God uses in Psalm 2 to crown a handpicked king who shall have to overcome all kinds of hurdles and obstacles before establishing the kingdom of God on earth forever and ever. Identifying Jesus as the king described by Psalm 2 is so important to this year's featured gospel that the words of coronation God speaks in Psalm 2 show up in the beginning, middle, and end of Mark's gospel. But along with Psalm 2, the shape and flow of Mark are also very much influenced by another part of the Old Testament as well.

This second Old Testament influence also shows up on the day of Jesus' baptism. After Mark refers to Psalm 2 by describing Jesus as God's son, he goes on to say that God the Father is well-pleased with Jesus. Taking us away from Psalm 2, this second description of Jesus is lifted straight out of Isaiah where we find four different descriptions of a servant of God who has come to be known as the Suffering Servant. Fearlessly and faithfully communicating a divine message that God pours into their ears every morning, the Suffering Servant is like the king of Psalm 2 in that their ministry on God's behalf shall be characterized by both fierce opposition and later victory. But between these familiar poles of resistance and ultimate victory, we also hear some

other things that set Isaiah's Suffering Servant apart from the handpicked king of God we learn about thanks to Psalm 2. And even though it may have been without our notice, some of the Suffering Servant's unique qualities and characteristics have been showing up already in Mark's description of Jesus.

By way of example, Jesus' receipt of the Holy Spirit on the day of his baptism conforms to what we learn about the Suffering Servant as we read through the four clusters of verses between Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 53. Similarly, Jesus' first four disciples, all fishermen, are drawn from the coastline just as Isaiah predicts. And in keeping with how Isaiah says the Suffering Servant shall bowl people over with unanticipated revelations, last week we were told that Jesus' hearers found him to be so new and so fresh that they were utterly amazed and astounded by him. And guess what! In today's reading from Mark, the correlations between Jesus and what Isaiah has to say about the Suffering Servant only continue.

By way of illustration, when some of our immediate area's Lutheran clergy gathered here at ALC on Tuesday around lunchtime as they do every week, someone asked why all the sick and possessed come to Jesus in the evening rather than during what we might call normal business hours. Since that question, I've remembered that Isaiah's Suffering Servant has a word for the weary; a word for those who day after day have labored all day long to the point of weariness and beyond only to continue to come up empty and out in the cold. More than anything else, this ministry to those on the margins, to the weary and the wandering, to the lost and as good as dead, is what punctuates Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant. In a way they'll never forget, Isaiah's Suffering Servant shall be there for those who have been abandoned and ignored by the caregivers and public servants of their time.

With the Suffering Servant on the scene, no one is going to fall through the cracks. The Suffering Servant shall find the lost and the dead and give them a new and better lease on life.

And to maximize the impact of their mission and ministry, the reach of the Suffering Servant, as described by Isaiah, shall be far and wide; never being restricted to just one place or one people. And if it hasn't come to you already, this is exactly what Jesus does in our reading from Mark.

First Jesus heals a sick widow, with widows being quite vulnerable in past and current societies like ancient Israel where wives can't inherit anything from their deceased husbands. To be a woman in ancient Israel, and a widow in particular, was likely to be someone wearied and tired out by self-serving sexism on the part of one's male relatives and neighbors. But in keeping with Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant, Jesus had a word custom made for our weary widow. Jesus let her know she mattered much in God's eyes and still had every reason to live, as she still had much to contribute. And then after healing not just a weary widow, but an entire weary community, what does Jesus do? Just like Isaiah's Suffering Servant, he's off to the next place so he might extend the reach of his attentive and affirming love and compassion. And called to follow Jesus like the first disciples drawn from the shore of the Sea of Galilee, it becomes clear that we're to do the same ourselves.

Already today I've shared something about Isaiah and his Suffering Servant which confirms this is to be the case. According to Isaiah 42:1, anyone who has had the Holy Spirit put upon them can in some sense be the prophet's Suffering Servant. Thanks to what happened at the Jordan River two thousand years ago, we already know Jesus is one person who can fit this bill. But thanks to our baptism, so are we; with both Scripture and Church tradition long connecting baptism with the faith-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. It's a reality that discloses every baptized member of God's family can in some sense be the Suffering Servant we read about in the book of

Isaiah. Like Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, we're to become people who would rather die than let anyone fall through the cracks; people who have a cup of cold water for the weary and the wandering and a new lease on life for the lost and those who as good as dead. And though living up to this mission will always require more than one strategy, today we don't want to overlook how sometimes just a timely and well-intentioned nudge can get the job done.

Depending on who you know and what they're experiencing, perhaps the business cards we've started to make available this weekend can help you provide the kind of timely and well-intentioned nudge that sometimes works. Listing our address, our service times, and other essential information, the cards aren't to be handed out to strangers who we know nothing about. But if we carry them around with us, they will be there to use when the right time and circumstance involving someone we know well comes to pass. And when a business card doesn't seem right, never underestimate the power of a hug, a kind word, or a note.

With my mom back in town for three weeks and her future hearing prospects looking better than they were not so long ago, I'd like to highlight something she once said to me. As my employer of a little over a decade was being bought out by out-of-state competition that had no job for me in 1998, and with time in Milwaukee, Wisconsin suddenly feeling like a lost and empty period in my life, my mom said to me, "You know Jesus and I ride every roller coaster with you." In the grand scheme of things, it wasn't very long before the church became a much more regular part of my life than it had been when I was a Christmas and Easter Christian throughout my twenties. When this change in my life somewhat surprisingly led to seminary, it was a long, silent, well-timed hug from Julia, my wife of four months, which helped to keep me going when my father died suddenly. And when my sister later lost a long and ugly battle with cancer, it sure was nice when after the funeral in another state Julia and I returned to our

unpacked home in a brand-new community only to find our mailbox pulled off its pole by all the cards sent by past congregations and those we hadn't even begun to serve yet. Together and apart, I hope that these gestures, none of them fancy or superhuman, speak to the power of a kind and well-timed nudge in the direction of Jesus who can heal any one of us just as capably as he healed many in Capernaum long ago. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, may we always be ready to invite, welcome, feed, and include the weary and the wandering so they might join us in the new and better life we have come to know through Christ, the Church, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen!